

NEWS

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Workforce Development announces unemployment benefits for victims of domestic and family violence

Frank O'Bannon, Governor
Alan D. Degner, Commissioner

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The Department of Workforce Development announced today important changes in unemployment benefits for victims of domestic and family violence in Indiana.

In May Governor Frank O'Bannon signed into law a bill that provides unemployment benefits for people who have either been forced to leave their jobs or were fired from their jobs because of domestic or family violence. Domestic violence victims were not previously eligible for unemployment benefits. Starting today, Indiana joins 31 other states offering these benefits.

"This new law is good for working families, said Alan Degner, commissioner of the Department of Workforce Development. "These benefits may make the difference in preventing the victim from having to choose between getting away from the abuser and going back into that relationship out of financial desperation. They can help support a family until new employment is found in a safer environment."

Workforce Development (WorkOne) office staff and Helpline support are undergoing extensive training on the issues associated with domestic violence, confidentiality matters, and screening and identifying claimants who may be eligible for benefits under this new law. Workers must receive at least six hours of initial training by domestic violence experts and continue to receive training annually.

Christine Wilkey, community plan coordinator for the Domestic Violence Network, was one of those experts who provided information to DWD staff. "I'm really pleased to see this happening in Indiana. This law will make a huge difference to those who have suffered the loss of a job or harassment on the job because of domestic violence—and their children," she said. "This law supports the goal of safe and secure families in Indiana."

The bill had strong bipartisan support in both the Indiana House (Liggett, D-Redkey; Lawson, D-Hammond; Whetstone, R-Brownsburg; Mays, D-Indianapolis) and the Senate (Harrison, D-Attica; Bowser, D-Michigan City; Craycraft, D-Selma; Lubbers R-Indianapolis; Antich, D-Merrillville). It also bolstered support from the business and labor communities and victims advocacy groups.

According to studies on workforce issues and domestic violence, harassment on the job by abusers is very common. Domestic violence victims often are consistently late for work, receive harassing phone calls and emails, lose their transportation or are visited by their abusers at the workplace. This puts them at risk of losing their jobs or being forced to quit.

Funding for these benefits comes from the unemployment trust fund. Benefits are not funded from personal taxes or employers' experience accounts. All claimants must meet normal Indiana unemployment insurance requirements for wages and other qualifying criteria.

Other legislation that goes into effect today includes an increase in the maximum weekly benefit amount from \$336 to \$348.

For more information contact the Department of Workforce Development Helpline at 1-888-WorkOne or visit your local WorkOne Center.